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ABSTRACT

Basic emotional and intellectual factors in motivation can help to stimulate the learner to acquire the five major literacy skills: listening, speaking, thinking, reading, and writing. Contagion, or the spread effect in psychology, is reflected in the readily communicated attitude of the teacher toward students and teaching itself. Similarly, teacher expectation of success or failure can significantly affect the learning process. Motivation may be stimulated by the development of students' interests, and by the application of the principle of effectance, or the ability of an individual to effectively deal with a given task. The utilization of sequence, consistency, and continuity in a positive, success-oriented framework can be especially valuable in reading instruction as well as in other areas. Always, the teacher is the controlling factor in motivation and the learning process. (KS)

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THE DYNAMICS OF MOTIVATION IN TEACHING LITERACY SKILLS

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THE DYNAMICS OF MOTIVATION IN TEACHING LITERACY SKILLS

In the field of literacy, motivation is a key word--a key that unlocks the door to learning. Literacy encompasses five major skills: listening, speaking, thinking, reading, and writing; and this paper deals with the dynamics of motivation in learning as it relates to these important skills.

In research over a period of years, the writer has studied the basic principles in motivation--emotional factors and intellectual factors which help to stimulate the learner. These principles can be used to teach children to listen, think, read, write, and speak; to educate them to take their place in a society which offers little to the illiterate.

Emotional Factors in Motivation

Contagion

William James once observed that the average person functions ninety percent in the emotional or affective domain and ten percent in the intellectual or cognitive domain. James' estimate has significant implications relating to the mental health of both teachers and students. It is no secret to educators that the attitude of teachers affects the behavior and achievement of their students. As Karl Menninger pointed out, the mental health of teachers is more communicable than measles, mumps, or a virus. Contagion, or the spread effect in psychology, is the principle by which everything affects the things it touches, for better or for worse. In a classroom, the teacher's state of mind is particularly contagious. It is readily communicated through words and through body language--eyes, lips, and gestures--which children immediately understand and to which they react. Children know when their teacher is angry, irritated, upset, or down-

cast; and his emotions rub off on them. They also know and respond when he is happy, enthusiastic, and filled with the enjoyment and challenge of teaching them. Feelings, whether positive or negative, are contagious.

In research with over a hundred first graders, the author evaluated teachers' attitudes by asking the children, "How do you know your teacher likes to teach you?" Out of twenty categorized responses, the word "smile" appeared in seventeen. The children said, "She smiles at me, and puts her arm around my shoulders." "She looks me straight in the eye and smiles at me." "She calls me by my name and smiles at me." "She laughs and smiles when I come into the room in the morning." "She helps me with my work and smiles at me." A smile is a very contagious thing, and children seem to interpret it as acceptance from their teacher; it gives them a feeling of self-worth.

Swick and Ross (1976) point out that a person functions most effectively when he or she has a sense of self-respect and self-esteem. This is particularly true in the classroom, where research has shown a positive correlation between children's emotional well-being and their learning achievement. A study of school children in Chicago revealed that there were two factors which were excellent predictors of success in school. The first was a positive self-concept and the second was a positive feeling toward their teacher and toward the other students in the classroom. (Kirsch, 1968). In a Wisconsin project in first grade reading, it was found that children who had good mental health, who felt good about themselves and the school situation, learned to read more effectively and achieved significantly more on the Gates Reading Test (Carrithers, 1965).

The author's own research (Stanchfield, 1971) confirms the premise that success in learning is related to the learner's emotional well-being. In a kindergarten project for the development of prereading skills, a checklist was devised to record each child's abilities. The list included twenty-six items in

the physical, socio-emotional, and intellectual areas. One item was consistently positively correlated with reading achievement at the end of the first grade. In the checklist it read, "Is happy in the school situation; enjoys school." A child who is unhappy--who has a low self-concept, who feels unloved and isolated--is destined to learn less effectively, regardless of materials or methodology.

David Ryans (1960) studied effective teacher characteristics for thirteen years. His research covered many variables and levels of instruction. He found that two of the most significant characteristics were warmth and enthusiasm. The first factor, warmth, is actually love expressed. This is a quality of love described by Erich Fromm in The Art of Loving (1962); love as a kind of listening concern for another human being, when one cares enough to listen, and then goes on caring enough to do something about the person's problem. This strong, vigorous quality is needed to teach the large numbers of our students who have never been taught effectively; and especially those students whose hearts are filled with hatred and hostility for school and educators.

Enthusiasm is another powerful factor in effective teaching. Emerson once said that nothing great or everlasting can be accomplished except by enthusiasm and inspiration. One can teach anything if he is enthusiastic about it. With the element of contagion, a teacher's enthusiasm is communicated to his students. How is this magic enthusiasm acquired? Sociologists who work with groups and know group relationships say that one way is to associate with people who are excited about something, no matter what it is--rock collecting, skiing, or working for a cause. Associate with those who have some feeling or enthusiasm about what they are doing, and it will rub off. Again, we find the dynamic effect of contagion.

Expectancy

Another essential factor in the affective domain is the element of expectancy. The writer has observed that teachers tend to teach more to those students they

consider to be bright. They expect more of them and spend more time and effort with them in order to fulfill their expectations. They call upon these children more often in class. They are apt to prompt and encourage them, while frequently ignoring students of lesser potential--the ones who need and could benefit by encouragement and attention.

Teachers' expectations also tend to be greater for girls than for boys, who make up the majority of disabled readers. Teachers in sex-segregated research classes have found boys more difficult to teach than girls. In the teachers' assessment, boys appeared to have a lower frustration for boredom and were less able to tolerate the monotony of regular classroom routines (Stanchfield, 1973). It is not surprising that sex differences in learning patterns is reflected in students' reading achievement. In considering these differences, Gunderson (1976) suggests, "The social and cultural expectations adults have for children should be examined. Girls are expected to have fewer problems in reading and statistics give credence to this expectation."

The motivational impact of expectancy was demonstrated by Rosenthal (1968) in the experimental program described in his book, Pygmalion in the Classroom. In the mid-1960's, Rosenthal and Jacobson initiated a study with pupils in all six grades of an elementary school. The classes for each grade were composed of children of similar abilities; above-average, average, or below-average. At the beginning of the school year, Rosenthal told the teachers that certain pupils in their classes had been identified on "tests of inflected acquisition" as "potential bloomers." When these children were tested at the end of the year, they had, indeed, "bloomed," largely because their teacher had expected them to.

Subsequent research by other experimenters, in schools, factories, and offices, confirmed Rosenthal's belief that self-fulfilling prophecy is a real phenomenon that occurs both in and out of the classroom. Although acknowledging that that it is not exactly known how the Pygmalion effect works, he proposed a four-

factor theory to explain the influences that produce this effect (Rosenthal, 1973). These criteria, which have been supported by independent studies, were termed climate, feedback, input, and output. Rosenthal stated that people with high expectancies concerning the performance of their students appear to:

- create a warmer social-emotional mood around their "special" students (climate);
- give more feedback to these students about their performance (feedback);
- teach more material and more difficult material to their special students (input) and
- give their special students more opportunities to respond and question (output).

Novelist Mark Harris (1973), commenting on the Pygmalion effect in the light of his own teaching experience, stated, "It appears, on the whole, that teachers see what they expect to see, and the pupil sees what the teacher sees." He asked teachers to consider each student on his own merits, to give confidence, to have patience, and to remember that "teaching is a form of loving."

Intellectual Factors in Motivation

Interest

In the whole field of motivation, interest is a vital factor. This principle is dynamic, projective, and propulsive. We all tend to do best the things we are interested in, and it is difficult to motivate students to read unless the subject matter is interesting to them. A teacher must explore and develop their interests; then he must provide them with the kinds of reading materials that capture their imagination and make them want to read.

When teaching boys to read, interest is especially critical, for boys have a narrower range of reading interests than girls. Ten years ago the writer conducted a study of reading preferences with approximately 300 fourth, sixth, and eighth grade boys. Fifty categories of reading interests were rated by asking,

"How often would you like to read a story about . . . ?" Response choices were "very often," "sometimes," "not very often," and "never." Analysis of results showed that the twelve most highly preferred categories were:

1. Outdoor life
2. Explorations and expeditions
3. Sports and games
4. Science fiction
5. Sea adventures
6. Tales of fantasy
7. Historical fiction
8. Humor
9. Everyday life adventures of boys their own age
10. Outer space
11. Mystery and detective
12. Animals and animal adventures

The least-liked categories included music, plays, art, family and home life, and poetry.

Recent independent follow-up studies conducted with boys in grades four through twelve indicate that reading preferences have remained relatively stable. The changes appear to reflect changing environmental trends or age differences. Marchese and Donia (1976) reported the results of a study with children in two elementary schools in Los Angeles. Using the twelve most highly preferred categories of the Stanchfield research, and a similar survey procedure, they rated the reading preferences of 244 boys in grades four, five, and six. Results showed that sports and games, explorations and expeditions, and sea adventures still were among the most favored choices; however, stories of outdoor life were less highly preferred. This variation in preference might be attributed to the fact that the children in these schools had had few experiences in camping or

related forms of outdoor recreation and group activities. The age scope was broadened in a follow-up study at the secondary level, which involved over 300 boys in the ninth through the twelfth grades (Fraim, 1976). In this project, all fifty of the original interest categories were surveyed. In addition to the first twelve categories, topics included hobbies, automobiles, occupations, music, and travel. Comparative results of the Stanchfield and Fraim studies showed that sports and games, outdoor life, humor, mystery, science fiction, and sea adventures retained their priorities, while hobbies, automobiles, occupations, music, and travel showed notable increases in popularity. The two categories that dropped appreciably were exploration and expeditions and outer space. While age differences can account for some of the variations, the investigators attributed the shifts in reading preference to changes in life styles and to new trends in nationwide and worldwide interests.

The Stanchfield and Fraim research projects also rated boys' preferences in characteristics of writing style. Both studies found that among the most favored characteristics were excitement, action, unusual experiences, and suspense. In the latter study, two characteristics that moved up in rating were, surprisingly, of a contradictory nature--familiar experiences and frightening experiences. It was concluded that increased interest in "frightening" subjects could be accounted for by the influence of television. Today's students also apparently enjoy reading about experiences they encounter in the world of reality.

These studies point to the need for providing reluctant readers with materials that satisfy their interests and give them an incentive to read. It is also important that teachers develop students' interests with materials that are relevant to their lives. The daily newspaper is an excellent resource in this area. It provides a wide range of relevant features, including the sports page, the television and movie sections, and the classified ads. "Help-wanted" ads are

especially useful in motivating students to read and to write. Other relevant reading materials are "how-to-do-it" articles; operators' manuals for cars and motorcycles; instructional pamphlets for sports equipment, and application forms for jobs or for a driver's license.

Teachers should not only explore and develop students' interests, but also make their interests visible. There are many different ways to provide visibility in the school environment: bulletin boards; hall cases for displays; special classroom projects; art and craft activities; music; and dramatization. Creative possibilities are endless for children when they have an opportunity to see their work appreciated and respected through an artistic display.

Effectance

The principle of effectance is important in the intellectual or cognitive domain. Effectance is the ability of an individual to deal effectively with a task. This principle indicates that the more successful a learner is, the more successful he tends to become. Expressed another way, success brings about more success and failure leads to more failure. Effectance in one task stirs within the learner the will, the drive, and the persistence to achieve another task. In the teaching of reading, success can be given by teaching each skill effectively at one level before going on to the next higher level.

From extensive research, the writer has identified three principles of learning that contribute to effectance and success in the teaching of reading. These are the principles of sequence, consistency, and continuity. The principle of sequence is applied when reading skills are taught in progressive order from the less difficult to the more difficult. Each skill must be taught and re-taught as necessary to achieve mastery before going on to the next level. In teaching vocabulary skills it is relatively easy to maintain sequential development. Logically, one teaches single consonants before blends. With comprehension skills it is more difficult to establish a hierarchy of complexity.

In general, however, the literal skills, such as reading for details, should be taught before going into the higher level interpretive skills; for example, making inferences, drawing conclusions, or predicting outcomes.

The principle of consistency is applied by teaching a skill, then giving practice in that skill until it is mastered. It is surprising how often a teacher will teach a lesson with an objective in one skill (for example, compound words) and then give practice exercises on generalized skills in word analysis. Each time there is a specific skill objective, practice must be given with exercises to determine whether that skill has been learned. If not, it must be re-taught and practiced again. This principle is effective in programmed learning.

The principle of continuity is applied by maintaining the skills taught in developmental reading throughout the grades and into high school. It also involves the continuous transfer of those skills to the content areas. This principle of learning has been widely neglected, as evidenced by the alarming numbers of high school students who cannot read their textbooks effectively.

Sequence, consistency, and continuity are the bases of effective teaching; but for many learners they need to be supplemented with success-inducing techniques in three areas--the psychomotor, the affective, and the cognitive. In the psychomotor or bodily function domain, underachievers may be given rewards for simple accomplishments, such as attending school, coming to school on time, or performing tasks in class and on the playground. In the affective domain, children may be rewarded for positive attitudes--for trying, for cooperating, or even for smiling. In the cognitive or intellectual domain, children can achieve success by being praised for answers they get right, regardless of how many they get wrong. In all three areas, success can be tremendously enhanced through expressions of praise and encouragement: "Good!" "Splendid!" "Wonderful!" "You can learn!" "I'll help you--will you try?" A teacher cannot use

too many success-giving words.

Summary

There are many approaches to motivation and many strategies for stimulating reluctant readers. In the writer's experience, the motivational factors discussed here are among the most important in teaching the skills of literacy. The factors of contagion, expectancy, interest, and effectance are dynamic elements that create a will to learn; and within each element, the teacher is the key. In the area of contagion, it is the teacher's attitude, communicated to his students, which affects their attitude toward the learning situation either positively or negatively. A teacher's expectancy of his students is apt to be fulfilled, particularly if it is heightened by warmth and concern for the learner. While the elements of interest and effectance emphasize materials and methodology, it is the teacher who selects or creates the materials and who initiates the methods that motivate a student to read. The teacher is always the controlling factor in the learning process.

Thus it comes back to teachers and their determination to create a dynamic and promising climate for learning. If teachers could have one motto to follow, an excellent one would be "If we will to, we can." In the words of Pico della Mirandola, the fifteenth century Florentine philosopher, "Let us not be content with mean things, but let us aspire to the highest and strive with all our forces to attain them--for if we will to, we can!"

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